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# Exchanges (part 2)

## “A Double-edged Sword”

by Charles Matthews

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For a background shape topic, I’m looking this time at angle plays such as White 1 in Diagram 1. Black will answer with an extension at 2 on one or other side. Then White should play once more in this part of the board, or there is a chance that the exchange of 1 and 2 may become bad – in the sense that it would have been better for White not to play here at all

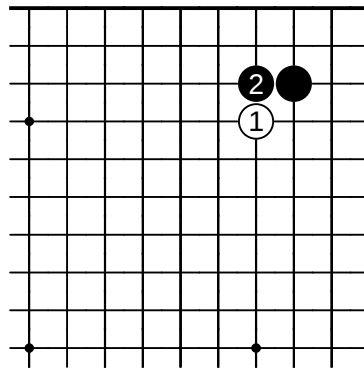


Diagram 1

The reasoning behind saying that is based on Diagrams 2 and 3. With a further play (triangle stone) in Diagram 2, Black can get a good position round here, leaving White no adequate way to follow up. If the order of plays were as in Diagram 3, we’d have the same result. Most players with some experience recognise plays such as White 1 there as counter-productive. A more subtle approach is required in areas where your opponent is already strong. Trying to develop the white stone by playing now at A will not look good when Black plays B. White is defending without making any territory, so far; Black is attacking and gaining influence.

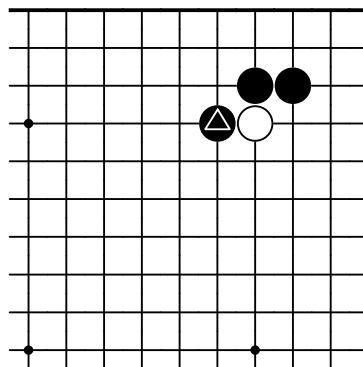
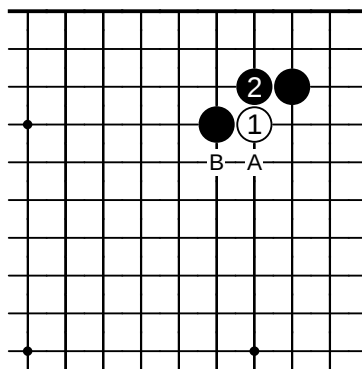


Diagram 2

Diagram 3



The loss involved in Diagram 2 or 3 should become clear when White's other chances round here are made explicit (Diagrams 4 and 5). These are better ways for White to become established, on whichever side makes more sense at the time

Diagram 4

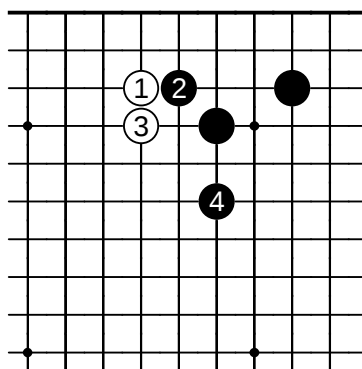
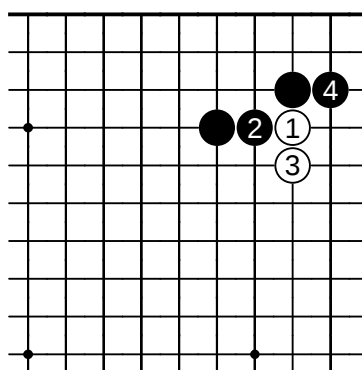


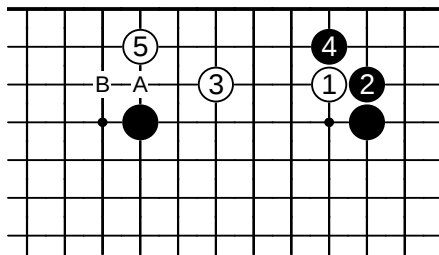
Diagram 5



Argument by transposing the order of moves has the most distinguished possible history, within the Japanese Go tradition: it is attributed to Honinbo Dosaku (1645-1702), fourth head of the Honinbo house, Meijin, and Go Saint. In a European foundation fable our hero, of known ancestry but unable to call on it for much in the way of practical help, slays giants with his trusty sword and native wit. Giants, as everyone knows, are graceless creatures distinguished by aggression and greed. Dosaku finished off the giant Gluttony, who liked at all cost to capture the opponent's stones, with the sharp sword of *tewari* (the analysis technique we were just discussing); and his brother Ferocity by the nimble dodging known as professional level as *amashi*, leaving the attacking plays as poor exchanges for the defensive replies. (For expansion on these matters, see Part II of the Yutopian book *Killer of Go* by Sakata.) With these and other theoretical developments, Japanese Go was set on a course that diverged significantly from the knife-edge balance of the ancient Chinese style.

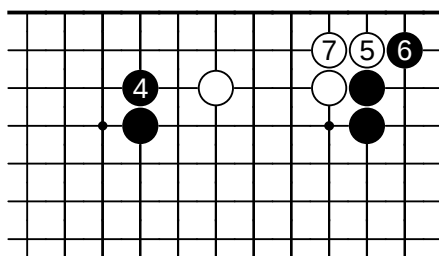
Or at least so the story goes. It must have been recognised early on that *tewari* couldn't be applied indiscriminately. Here's a worthwhile example.

Diagram 6



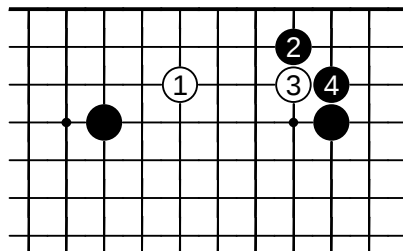
This is a possible way to deal with the Chinese-style formation that appears in so many amateur games. White 1 for Black 2 may be a loss; but after 3 Black feels inclined to play at 4, leaving White a free hand to play 5 (could be at A also, even possibly at B) to get established in the middle of Black's framework. If Black instead follows White around, playing 4 as in Diagram 7, it seems as if White builds a base almost painlessly.

Diagram 7



Now if we are allowed to permute the plays at will, Diagram 8 would seem to tell us that Black has erred here. White 1 is fair enough, Black 2 looks like a beginner's cautious response – why not play to the left of 3 for a proper enclosure? Then White 3 for Black 4 is a definite loss, much like the white play in Diagram 3. But surely less heinous? Isn't it the case that Black has played worse here, on balance?

Diagram 8

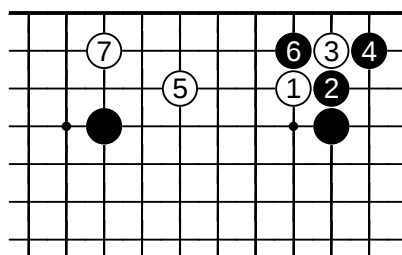


The distrust in *tewari*, as applied without discrimination by the inexpert, can be seen as stemming from a rejection of the hidden assumption in the argument just presented. Yes, you can identify poor exchanges when you see them. No, you can't set them off against each other. There is no just book-keeping technique of exchanges, no secure way of cancelling them off algebraically. If you are skilful enough, you can apply this kind of analysis; if not, unfortunately, you end up proving far too much, to nobody's satisfaction but your own. It may be the condition of amateur Go that both sides play bad moves, often in close succession. But there is no guarantee that an exchange that is intuitively a loss can always be attributed a definite negative points value. That assumes, for example, that you can count in the middle of a fight, as well as at momentary pauses.

Logically speaking, these values clearly do exist, at least if we are dealing with concrete whole board positions; but why should we be able to gain access to them? This is a very interesting if perhaps fruitless point. Games of Go can be played to an end and a definite score. A mistake costs a precise number of points against best play. What that number is can be seen as an atomic fact about Go. We are probably not going to be able to acquire certain knowledge of these. (Cue for some talk about the early philosophy of Wittgenstein?) To be more accurate, outside endgame positions we can only hypothesise. Professional players often talk about exchanges that are a loss, but of less than a point. This defies pinning down, but seems to serve them well enough (oh good, chance to drag in the later Wittgenstein too).

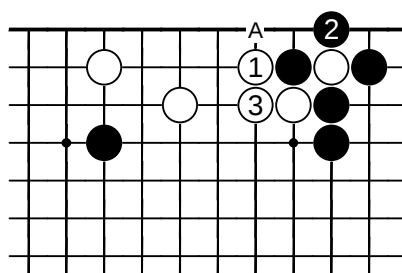
Let's try to get some handle on this problem with a variant. What goes on in Diagram 9 simply interpolates an exchange 3/4 in the sequence of Diagram 6.

Diagram 9



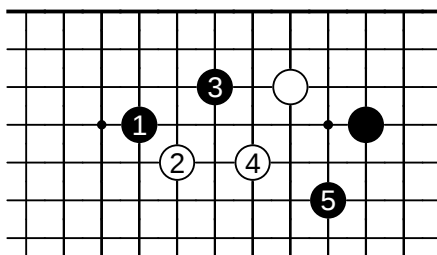
You end up with a similar position, except that White has lost the stone 3. This looks like a pure loss? Not exactly – if White wishes to call on the sequence of Diagram 10 for eye shape, there might seem to be some point. Black's eye shape has of course been radically improved as well. If you are one of those players who never mentally allow the opponent any safe territory or live group, this will be felt as a disadvantage. In truth it would adversely affect White's chances of fighting on the right side. In addition White has suffered a loss of potential around A.

Diagram 10



Here is a position in which I recently saw a 9 dan pro apply *tewari*.

Diagram 11



A strong amateur suggested White 2 in Diagram 11. The pro immediately laid out the rest of the sequence. Then by re-ordering as in Diagram 12, he identified White 4 as a slack play: it must be at A, then Black will play at B for a less-developed position. Here at least, when just one side is accused of a poor exchange, it seems *tewari* is trusted.

Diagram 12

